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ABSTRACT

To improve the education available to low achieving students, the Texas State Board of Education has developed new policies regarding accreditation, state regulation, and the provision of technical assistance to schools. The accreditation policy shifts state review away from districts in general and to specific schools identified as insufficiently productive in increasing student achievement. State regulations have been revised to permit greater flexibility in program design at the district level. These two changes shift the focus of accountability away from success at following bureaucratic procedures and toward success at obtaining satisfactory educational outcomes. The board's technical assistance policy is aimed at offering a variety of resources to those specific school sites identified as needing improvement. The Texas model meets research-established criteria for effective technical assistance by having a clear purpose, responding to recipient needs, using a systematic yet flexible approach, and encouraging the development of self-sufficiency in the recipient. (PGD)

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION

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REACH

REALISTIC EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT CAN HAPPEN

EA 018 877

The State Board of Education has initiated steps to combat the problems associated with the education of low-achieving students in Texas schools. The Board's strategy, which makes the education of these students a top priority, focuses existing legislation and resources in three areas:

Accreditation • Rules • Technical Assistance

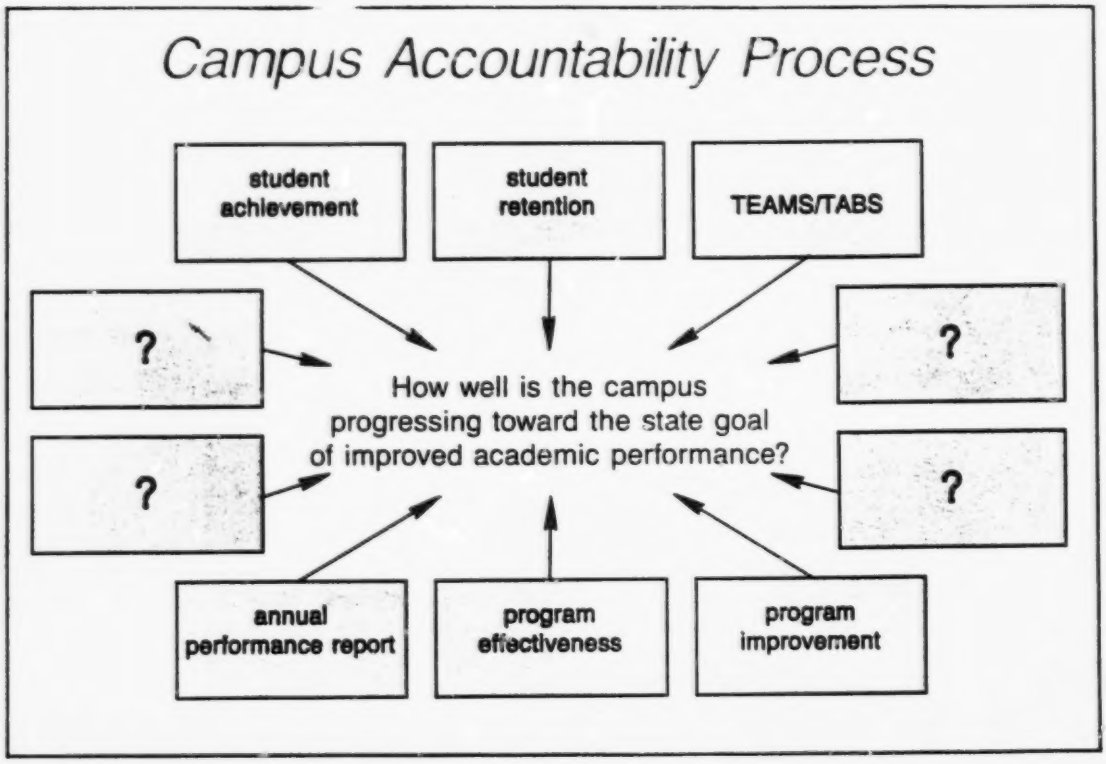
Accreditation

Traditionally, the state's accreditation monitoring process has consisted of an on-site survey of each of the 1,069 districts in the state over a three-year period. Monitoring teams checked compliance in the areas of governance, personnel, instruction, facilities, and fiscal management. As many classrooms as possible were visited on all campuses. Summary findings of the accreditation teams listed areas of excellence, recommended improvement, or violation.

The first of three components of the Board's new school improvement plan will ultimately shift the focus of accreditation teams from district regulation to individual campus accountability. Specifically, accreditation teams will provide concentrated support to those campuses where data gathered from various sources have identified them as least productive in increasing student achievement.

Rules

Board rules facilitate the implementation of state and federal regulations. They also provide guidelines for school administrators to reach goals established in the Board's long range



plan, among them improved student achievement at all levels.

Traditionally, these rules have been viewed by school districts as being primarily regulatory in emphasis. Districts, particularly in recent years, have responded to regulation by spending excessive amounts of time documenting compliance, sometimes at the expense of their instructional program.

By relaxing Board rules, regulatory detail will be reduced to provide broad direction and clearly defined goals for school improvement. School districts will have more flexibility to focus staff, funds, and time on designing programs that truly meet their unique instructional needs. It is the Board's opinion that additional concentration of resources on the quality of instruction will be more productive in the end.

This second of three components of the Board's improvement plan is a deliberate effort to encourage more district flexibility. At the same time, however, the performance-based accreditation component will hold districts more accountable then ever for the productive use of campus resources.

Technical Assistance

The third component of the Board's school improvement mandate provides technical assistance to campuses identified for accreditation visits. The purpose of these visits will be to support campuses with critical needs with a variety of educational resources related to school improvement. Services will include (1) analysis of impediments to good student performance, (2) action plans for removing impediments, and (3) appropriate models to increase school success. All technical assistance activities will focus on the unique characteristics of districts with problem campuses.

In summary, the new state initiative for school improvement will:

- provide greater flexibility for school improvement
- hold campuses more accountable for the productive use of resources
- support low-achieving campuses with technical assistance resources

Characteristics of effective technical assistance

Research reports, both in education and business management, describe various support systems that provide staff development, planned change agents, consultant services, and literature searches to help bring about change in institutions. Certain characteristics are indicative of successful technical assistance:

- **Technical assistance must have a purpose.** The Texas model will target assistance to campuses with inadequate student performance results.
- **Technical assistance must be responsive to recipient needs.** While state efforts at technical assistance have usually been targeted to general audiences, the new model will target unique campus needs.
- **Technical assistance must be systematic, yet flexible.** The Texas model will maintain the regular three-year accreditation monitoring cycle and utilize existing campus student-performance data. As an automated information base is developed and expanded, analysis of campus productivity will be enhanced. The Texas model will also allow ample flexibility for campuses to adapt recommendations and models for improvement provided by school target teams.
- **Technical assistance should build self-sufficiency.** Where history suggests the environment of a particular campus is unproductive, resources will be made available to help bring about needed changes. The goal is to encourage all Texas schools to implement effective instructional programs that are compatible with their needs and resources. The chart in this publication titled *Texas Education Agency Technical Assistance* summarizes the agency's plan to support this school improvement goal.

Readings

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REACH

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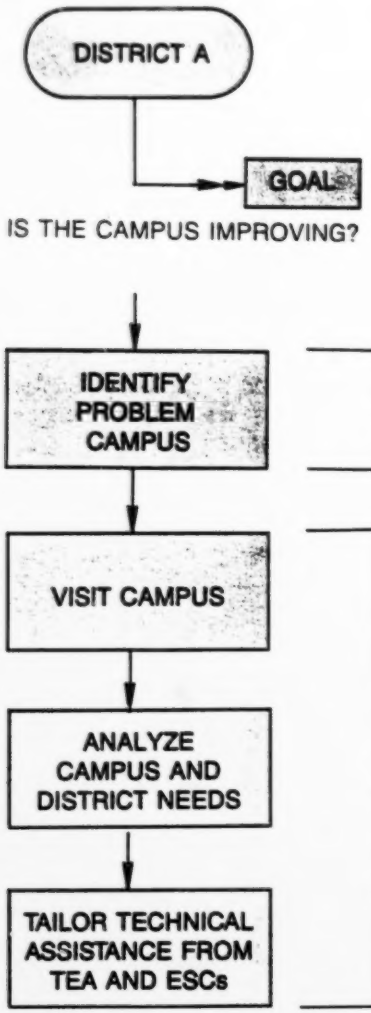
1986

New curriculum rules adopted by the State Board of Education in June 1986 require districts to provide alternative strategies or programs that will help low-achieving students succeed in school. REACH is intended to provide technical assistance information to complement this new district responsibility. Booklets describing successful models of alternative approaches to learning will be distributed during the 1986-87 school year. For information about this publication, contact the Division of Exemplary Programs, Texas Education Agency, at (512) 463-9661.

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

This chart summarizes the state agency's plan to target the improvement of the state's lowest-achieving campuses, beginning in 1986-87.

Updated accreditation procedures will be in effect on all other campuses.



- Campuses with critical needs will be identified by the Division of Accreditation.

Identified campuses will receive technical assistance support services including, but not limited to, the following

- A series of on-site visits by school target teams from
  - The Division of Accreditation
  - The Divisions of Curriculum Development and Special Programs
  - Education Service Centers
- Access to technical assistance publications developed by the agency to support school improvement efforts. (REACH, Vol. 1, Parts 1-5, is the first in a series of these publications.)
- Access to a communication network linking models of effective educational programs with low-performing schools to produce better student performance.